

# East Oxford Archaeology Project

## Newsletter Summer/Autumn 2012

A slightly longer newsletter than normal, partly because it has been a little while since the last newsletter came out, and mostly because we've been really busy and have lots to report.

### Making plans for 2013

Please put Friday 11th January 2013 in your diaries. We will be having a project get together at the Ark-T centre between 7 and 9pm to review our work in 2012 and to discuss plans for 2013. This will include a report back on each of the trenches from the Minchery Farm excavation and a chance to see some of the hundreds of excavation photos that couldn't be included in this newsletter.

### BAA: Highly commended

The project team (David G, Jane, Olaf and Jo) went to The British Museum on 9 July to the British Archaeological Awards Ceremony. Known informally as the 'Archaeology Oscars' these biennial awards are sponsored by the Council for British Archaeology and tend to attract a large gathering of the 'great and the good' of British Archaeology. Our category: 'Best Community Archaeology Project' had three nominees: Archeox, the Thames Discovery Project, and the Folkestone Town Archaeology project. After what seemed like an age sitting through most of the other award categories (e.g. best book, best discovery), we finally came to ours. Each project had a short film made for it – in which many of our volunteers featured! When the result was announced, the Thames Discovery project was named as the 2012 winner. They are a great project and have been going quite a bit longer than us, so we weren't too disappointed and may have another go in 2014. All in all it was a very positive experience and nice to be nominated!



Would you let this lot run a community project?

### Geophysical survey

Over the summer we upgraded to a dual sensor gradiometer and have already put it to good use. In June Archeox volunteers did an intensive week of gradiometer surveys on parks and playing fields across east Oxford.

The first survey was at **Rosehill**, continuing the survey shown in the last newsletter into the sports ground and playing fields immediately to its east. We had hoped that a survey of this hilltop site would reveal a major prehistoric site, perhaps east Oxford's answer to Maiden Castle or Windmill Hill. Sadly modern disturbance has created so much magnetic noise it is almost impossible to see the more subtle traces of archaeology within the survey data.



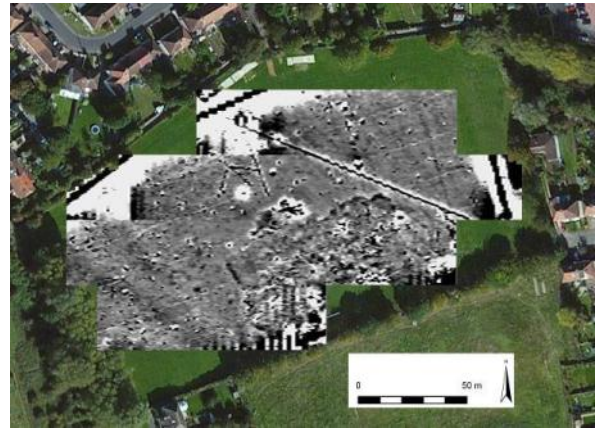
Rosehill survey - how many goal posts can you see? (base mapping 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS c1880 © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited 2012)



Joanne with the new gradiometer

## Geophysical survey (cont.)

The next survey was **Donnington** recreation ground next to the Boundary Brook between Iffley Road and Meadow Lane. Again modern ferrous contamination made the survey results difficult to interpret over much of the site. However, some subtle (and possibly archaeological) features are visible in the quieter areas. It is hoped to return to the site to do an earth resistance survey of some of these possible features in the New Year.

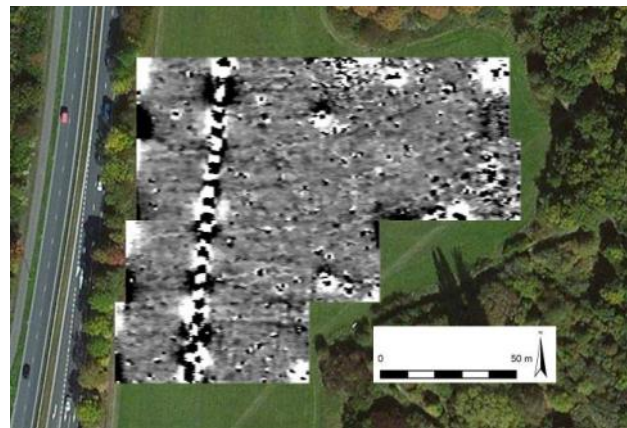


Donnington survey (aerial photo from Bing Maps © Microsoft Corporation and its data suppliers 2012)

The last site to be surveyed was a playing field belonging to **Larkrise and St Gregory's** schools 400m to the east of Donnington recreation ground on the north bank of the Boundary Brook. As with the other sites modern ferrous 'noise' makes the results difficult to interpret. It is possible that three subtle parallel linear features may relate to the allotments that covered the site until at least the late 1950s.

Larkrise/St Gregory's survey with allotment plots in the background (base mapping 2<sup>nd</sup> revision OS c1920 © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited 2012)

Whilst researching potential sites for this autumn's excavation we also carried out a survey on land between the ring road and **Brasenose Wood**, just north of **Horspath** Industrial Estate. The site lies on the proposed line of the Dorchester and Alchester Roman road. It had been hoped that the survey would show the line of the road as well as any associated Roman activity. When the survey failed to show any clear signs of a Roman road, villa or fortress our focus narrowed to Minchery Farm.



Brasenose/Horspath survey (aerial photo from Bing Maps © Microsoft Corporation and its data suppliers 2012)

## Test pits

We have continued to dig test pits in and around east Oxford and are now well over the 50 mark. Here is a quick review of just some of them.

In late June Jane, Jo and Olaf spent a couple of days doing a small gradiometer survey and digging a test pit with pupils from **St Michael's primary school** on Marston Road. The survey revealed traces of a removed boundary wall, and the test pit uncovered traces of a demolished brick structure thought to be a WW2 air raid shelter.

In early July Olaf and Steve excavated a test pit with staff and pupils from **Northfield School**, Blackbird Leys. The test pit was originally targeted to locate a gradiometer survey anomaly identified by Paula last year. It now seems likely that all of the survey data does not relate to archaeological features, but to soil and rubble introduced as levelling when the school sports field was being built. The surprise discovery, however, was a 1m deep peat deposit close to the line of the Northfield Brook.



## Test pits (cont.)



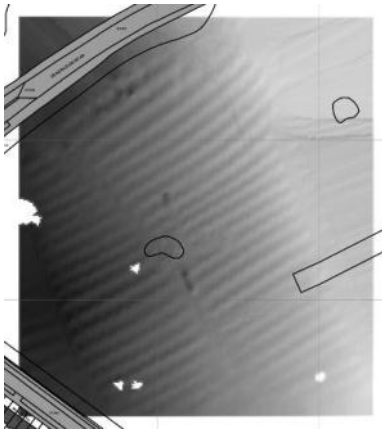
Test pitting on Bedford Street

We also excavated two test pits on **Bedford Street** at the point where the higher ground of Iffley Road begins to slope towards the Thames. Olaf has been particularly interested to work here as important collections of Mesolithic and Neolithic flint tools were made in this area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As luck would have it both test pits produced a small number of pieces of worked flint, including a flake from a potentially Mesolithic blade core. Olaf is keen to excavate more test pits in this area. If you know anyone living in the Fairacres Road/Bedford Street/Iffley Fields area who might want a test pit dug in their garden get in touch with [olaf@archeox.net](mailto:olaf@archeox.net).

Two test pits were excavated in the run up to the Minchery Farm excavation. One on Between Towns road investigated the back garden of comedian Ronnie Barker's former house. The other test pit was on Mill Lane in Iffley revisited the location of one excavated in 2011 and revealed the line of a Medieval wall

## Humps and bumps in South Park

In early August Olaf, David P and Leigh Mellor spent a couple of days using the project's GPS to record earthworks in **South Park**. The GPS can record a position in three dimensions with an accuracy of less than a centimetre either at the push of a button, or automatically at a set distance or interval. To begin



Digital terrain model of ridge and furrow in South Park

with we surveyed a small area on foot carrying the GPS set to record a data point every second. Quite a lot of walking later we had produced a 3D terrain model of a very small area of the park. Next, after a eureka moment, we went to talk to the city council parks department about lawn mowers. As an experiment we gaffer-tapped the GPS to one of the Council's lawn mowing tractors and set it to record. At a steady speed of 5 mph and in 5m spaced strips the tractor and GPS combo hoovered up the contours of ridge and furrow field system at the west end of the park. In just over an hour we had recorded just under 3 hectares of the park. A combination of holidays and the Minchery excavation meant that we didn't get a chance to go back to do more but our plan is to return with the GPS when the council start cutting the grass again in the spring.



Topographic survey the lazy way

## Minchery Farm

After a summer spent looking for a suitable excavation site for this year, in mid-September Oxford City Council gave the project permission to dig on their land at Minchery Farm Paddock, close to the Kassam stadium, between Littlemore and Blackbird Leys. The paddock is known to overlie the remains of Minchery Priory (founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century), and previous work on the site had also produced evidence of Roman and prehistoric activity. A couple of very busy weeks ensued, finalising permissions, ordering site infrastructure and clearing vegetation. After an initial set up week the site opened to volunteers on 9<sup>th</sup> October. Over the course of the next five weeks three very different trenches were excavated.



Aerial-cam view of trench three and the Priory Inn Pub



**Trench One** was excavated at the northern end of the site to investigate waterlogged deposits associated with the Northfield Brook. As well as being the smallest it was also the soggiest, muddiest and probably the least popular trench. Four weeks of battling with a high water table and a temperamental pump revealed a 1m deep peat deposit with good potential for palaeoenvironmental analysis. This was in part overlain by a spread of stone slabs associated with Roman pottery, tiles and animal bone.



Sampling peat in trench one

The rich archaeology of **Trench Two** was a bit of a surprise: we didn't expect so many buildings, a big ditch or prehistoric flints. The walls and the large hearth, probably for smithing iron, were revealed with artefacts and pottery from the 12<sup>th</sup> – early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. So the buildings were in use within the same life span as the Priory and were likely to have been part of the Priory farm or of a manor linked to it. Apart from some early 21<sup>st</sup> century archaeology (left by car-burners and archaeologists) nothing found in the trench was later than the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. After the dissolution of the Priory this area must have been used continually as a paddock or field.

Across the south of the trench ran the foundations and lower courses of a well-built wall almost a metre high, which had been partially but carefully demolished, probably



Cleaning up in trench two



Frosty planning in trench two

at time the Priory was dissolved. In its construction this wall was very similar to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Chapel at Bartlemas – including a distinctive relieving arch. The finds relating to this building included

fine pottery, metalwork, decorated tiles and animal bones suggesting the building was domestic. Running NE to SW across the trench and west of the buildings was a ditch, c 2.5m wide and at

least 1.2 m deep. This ditch, even if it originated as a natural watercourse, had also been altered by people. Was it a moat or a channel taking water to fishponds? That water would certainly have been useful to those working in the smithy in the east of the trench. A wide line of vertically laid cobbles provided foundations for two post bases and may have supported a wooden superstructure. Post-holes in the trench suggested this may have been part of a partially open-sided but roofed building over the large smithing hearth. The hearth itself was beautifully built using large stone slabs and vertically laid tiles.



Barbed and tanged arrowhead

The medieval buildings had disturbed traces of prehistoric activity: an exquisite Early Bronze Age flint barbed and tanged arrowhead was found amidst the demolition rubble as well as several scrapers, cores and blades, at least some of which were older, in other medieval contexts. The only suggested plan for the 15<sup>th</sup> century Priory buildings proposed a small cloister tucked to the west and north of the still-standing Priory pub and made no guesses about the use of the surrounding land. What was uncovered in Trench 2 demonstrates that there were substantial buildings, including workshops, over a much wider area, and that the land had been well managed and exploited.



One of the most exciting discoveries in **Trench Three** was a large midden spread. This contained fantastic dietary evidence including huge amounts of oyster shell, animal bone and some beautiful sherds of Medieval glazed pottery with very little modern intrusive material.

We (finally!) uncovered a wall line running east/west through the trench and at right angles to the Priory pub. Some of the stones were nicely cut and some utilized already straightened edges without the need for further shaping. The interior face of the walls still retained some of its render and associated finds included remnants of vivid



green medieval painted plaster and very fine lead lined coloured glass.

We found very clear evidence for the demolition and robbing of the stone walls with a

clear robber trench removing a north/south return from the east/west wall line which had then been backfilled and interestingly has the remnants of a much later wall reusing the same foundations. This later building is likely to be a small farm building showing on the 1880's map of the area- maybe a cattle barn or store? An exceptional piece of cut stone appears to have been used as a drain within this building though this may not have been its original purpose.

This area has clearly had numerous phases of demolition and rebuild meaning that we are left with fragmented structures but enough to at least piece together more of the history of this site including the most obvious observation- that this was not a small monastic complex as previously thought.

Walls at right angles to the pub in trench three

On the final day before back filling we were visited by Adam Stanford of **Aerial-Cam** who took a series of stunning low level aerial photos of the site with a digital camera on a 22m telescopic pole attached to his landrover. His website [www.aerial-cam.co.uk](http://www.aerial-cam.co.uk) is well worth a look.



Cleaning and recording in trench three



Aerial-Cam of trench two



Aerial-Cam recording trench two



Aerial-cam of trench three

The Minchery excavation exceeded all our expectations. We had some really interesting and varied archaeology, some amazing finds, had great press coverage and even received a visit from a very enthusiastic vice chancellor of the University. But what made it all possible was the enthusiasm and hard work of all the Archeox volunteers. We logged over 700 volunteer days during the course of the excavation! Thank you to everyone who got involved and made the excavation such a success.



Vice Chancellor Andrew Hamilton

## Bartlemas Chapel

The report on last year's excavation at Bartlemas chapel is almost finished, we are just waiting for the specialist summaries on pottery and environmental evidence. We are in the process of overhauling the website and hope to have the report up online early in the new year.

A number of volunteers were involved in the Bartlemas building survey back in September which went very well. The phases of the chapel's construction are very complicated and are coupled with minor and major alterations. Photographs don't always illustrate phasing evidence well, particularly the subtle evidence more obvious when you see a building in person so the team interpreted and recorded what they could see using a scale drawing. There is plenty more recording to be done which we hope to do in the New Year.



Buildings recording at Bartlemas

## Finds Washing

We have made excellent progress already with the Minchery Paddock finds washing. Gill Mellor ran sessions in Littlemore Village Hall throughout the dig and Jo ran sessions at the Clockhouse Community Centre in Blackbird Leys. Sessions are now continuing at Littlemore Village Hall and the Ark T Centre over the coming weeks and both finds washing and sorting sessions will continue into the new year so do check emails and keep an eye on the website or contact [jo@archeox.net](mailto:jo@archeox.net) for more details.

## Clockhouse

We have been working quite closely with the Clockhouse in Blackbird Leys over the last few months with finds washing sessions, guided site tours during the Minchery dig and gave a talk on the excavation and a finds washing taster session at one of their evening social group meetings. We will also be holding a stall at the launch of the community market in Blackbird Leys on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December- if you would like to be involved in helping with the stall then contact [jo@archeox.net](mailto:jo@archeox.net).



Finds washing at the Clockhouse

## Brownies and Scouts

We are extending our youth outreach as a project and most recently have been working with local Guides and Scout groups. We had a 'garbology' workshop with 1<sup>st</sup> South Oxford Brownies back in November where the girls used modern 'finds' that we all throw away today to try and investigate what sort of people owned them and recording their finds using real context sheets! The 43<sup>rd</sup> (Old Marston) Scouts got to have a go at finds washing and photographing small finds experimenting with scales and different colour back grounds to see which produced the best pictures.

## Warneford Hospital

As well as the exciting Matrix art project, Archeox has just kick started an art project with Echoes group through Artscape (<http://www.artscape-obmh.org.uk/index.php>) at the Fusion Arts centre in east Oxford. The purpose of this group is to encourage alternative ways of getting involved with and thinking about archaeology through very creative activities. The group are just about to have a finds washing and handling session to introduce them to archaeology before getting stuck into some arty archaeology after Christmas. They will work towards creating a piece that we can use at open days and events. We will keep you updated on the progress of this group!



## Place Names Group

We have continued to haunt the local archives - particularly investigating maps and other records in the Bodleian. Our meetings quite often focus on a particular theme - for instance, we looked at field names and place names relating to crafts and industry.

Hacklingcroft is one of our oldest names - where St Clement's Church now is, was - in 1004 - a field named for the flax processing that took place there. We have looked at wild plants in names (Hockmore in Cowley may commemorate where marsh mallow grew). We had a special session with James Bond on field names, and we looked at names referring to places where livestock were kept - in the centre of Headington was a field called Sheepcot Furlong. We've been learning more about how to research field names and place names and Peter Finn gave us a session on how Old English words have been transformed over time in place names.

## Archeox working with the Ashmolean Museum

At the end of September we had more "taster sessions" with volunteers in a joint venture with the Ashmolean Museum working on boxes of finds in storage. The project's aim is to get as much information as possible from finds linked to East Oxford and stored in the Ashmolean, for example: type of pottery, where was it found, and where it can be accessed now. The Ashmolean's aim is to list the artefacts contained in the box, repack where necessary, take photographs and update the computer system. Our joint aim is to provide training in pottery recognition, archive procedures and database management.

The project has made excellent progress; we have sorted and repacked all the Roman pottery from the East Oxford Area, primarily from the Littlemore excavations during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as finds from Sandford and Rosehill. We still need to do some work on photographing the objects and updating the database. There is still the medieval pottery and the pre-Roman artefacts from East Oxford to examine and many, many more special collections to investigate.

Due to the Minchery Farm excavation during October and part of November, many regular volunteers were busy digging but we now hope more of you will be able to take advantage of this opportunity. The non-diggers have become very experienced in pottery identification and are ready to pass on their knowledge. In the New Year, we will continue with regular Wednesday afternoon sessions: two per month, on the second and fourth Wednesdays. We are also planning one weekend afternoon - date to be confirmed shortly.

If you have not yet registered your interest in this interesting project and for regular updates, please contact Roelie by email ([roeliebom@hotmail.com](mailto:roeliebom@hotmail.com))

## South Park and Headington Hill survey month

Throughout January Olaf and David P will be carrying out Geophysical survey across areas of Headington Hill and South Park. The surveys will try to build up an image of the parliamentary presence in the Headington Hill region of East Oxford during the Civil War. Some activity in the area is noted on historical maps and Civil War archaeology has been located in the area during development control work on ground owned by Brookes adjacent to the Parks. It is hoped that the surveys of the wider area will be able to provide a better idea of the location of the Parliamentary siege works mentioned in some historical sources, and possibly provide a focus for a small scale test pit investigation. Contact [olaf@archeox.net](mailto:olaf@archeox.net) to get involved with the survey.

## The Matrix Art Project

Three artists, who have worked together on music and visual arts projects with all kinds of organisations, are hoping to work with Archeox. Some of you met Tara (a musician), Lucy (an artist) and Filipe (a composer) at the Minchery excavation. They have been inspired by the idea of the archaeological process, that journey from the choice of a site to the final report, and by the many ways we record that process - drawing, writing, photographing. Music and art are created by layering sound, colour and texture, archaeologists work with layers too - understanding stratigraphy, working with colours and textures. Tara, Lucy and Filipe would like to work with you all to produce a visual and sound exhibit that incorporates their responses to being on a site, and going to post-excavation workshops, with your thoughts on being involved in the archaeological process. They hope to come to workshops in the New Year when they will be able to talk to you informally about their ideas.

[www.lucysteggals.co.uk](http://www.lucysteggals.co.uk)

[www.colourmining.co.uk](http://www.colourmining.co.uk)

<http://soundcloud.com/quest1ensemble>

<http://soundcloud.com/filipe1santos1sousa>